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**Joint Inspection Unit**

# Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the transition from the Optical Disk System to the Official Document System

## Report of the Secretary-General

**Addendum**

*Summary*

The comments contained in the present document reflect the general satisfaction with which the Secretary-General has received the constructive findings and recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit on the transition from the Optical Disk System to the Official Document System (see A/58/435). In responding to the recommendations of the Unit, the Secretary-General provides updated information on the efforts of the administration in complying with the various legislative provisions and gives an evaluation of the progress made to date on the management and re-engineering of the system as mandated.

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# I. Introduction

1. The Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) report on the transition from the Optical Disk System to the Official Document System (ODS) (see A/58/435) presents a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and teething problems experienced in that regard in various organizations of the United Nations system, including problems of system access, speed of operation and management of resources. It accurately reflects the significant strides that have been made in enhancing the satisfaction and appreciation of both users and providers of ODS.

# II. The recommendations

***Recommendation 1*: The General Assembly may wish to:**

(a) **Reaffirm that its endorsement of the initial Optical Disk System as an archival and retrieval system of official documents meant that its implementation should cover the entire Organization, including the United Nations Office at Nairobi and all the regional commissions;**

(b) **Request the Secretary-General to pursue vigorously the implementation of ODS at ECA, ECLAC, ESCAP and the United Nations Office at Nairobi, and to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session on progress made.**

2. The recommendation has been duly noted. The regional commissions remain committed to full participation in the shared indexing programme. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific has recently concluded the processing of its documents and their integration into ODS, and over 300 documents of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean have been posted on the system since the commencement of the exercise, in January 2003. In consultation with the Information Technology Services Division and the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia has also been able to resolve all problems associated with the input of Arabic data into ODS. The full efforts of the Secretary-General in implementing the recommendation are reflected in the findings of JIU contained in paragraph 21 of its report.

***Recommendation 2*: The Secretary-General should**:

(a) **Remind all units responsible for posting documents on ODS that, as recalled in his report A/C.5/56/12 to the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, they should abide strictly by the rule established by resolution 36/117 B of 10 December 1981 and subsequent resolutions of the Assembly, which mandate that no language version of a particular document, including its original language version, is to be released for dissemination until all other prescribed language versions are available for simultaneous distribution;**

(b) **Ensure that the above rule is more clearly described and implemented in accordance with the relevant dispositions on languages of documentation prescribed by the rules of procedure of each governing body concerned;**

(c) **Include in his report to the General Assembly on the pattern of conferences information about any departures from the official policy found on ODS and provide the reasons why**.

3. The administration fully supports this recommendation, including the need for more clearly defined and implementable policies with regard to simultaneous posting of official language versions on ODS. A cursory review of the examples annexed to the JIU report reveals many cases where the document does indeed exist in the official languages but has not been posted on ODS.

***Recommendation 3*: The General Assembly may wish to revise the policy of fee-for-service access to ODS established by its resolution 51/211 F of 15 September 1997 and authorize the Secretary-General to apply as soon as practicable a new policy based on free, public access to the system, subject to the comments and recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the relevant provision made in the proposed programme budget for 2004-2005**.

4. The Secretary-General supports the recommendation. As cited by JIU in paragraph 35 of its report, as a consequence of the acceptance of the Secretary-General's proposal by the Committee on Information, free public access to the Official Document System through links from the Organization's web site is now being made available. The Information Technology Services Division is requesting funding in the 2004-2005 budget to open ODS itself to the public.

***Recommendation 4*: The Secretary-General should include in his report to the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly on the pattern of conferences, or under a more appropriate agenda item, information about the status of the digitization project undertaken by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, as well as an assessment of the backlog of official documents not yet released or missing in the required languages on ODS, along with his recommendations on how to address the related issues**.

5. The recommendation has been duly noted. However, it is proposed that, given the volume of retrospective work required, the task of digitization should be shared among the United Nations libraries.

***Recommendation 5*: The Secretary-General should review the overall process of the management of ODS, including whether the function of actual inputting of documents on the system at Headquarters should revert to the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management**.

6. The recommendation is strongly supported by the United Nations Secretariat. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management is presently considering a joint review with the Information Technology Services Division on how best to post official documents issued at Headquarters in a timely manner on ODS in accordance with the relevant legislative requirements governing the simultaneous release of official documents in all official languages. The administration accepts the justification of JIU for the recommendation, which for the most part is already being implemented.

***Recommendation 6*: In order to further widen awareness and use of ODS by all interested stakeholders:**

**(a) The General Assembly may wish to invite Member States to make the system more widely available to their diplomatic missions as appropriate and to national administrations, in particular those dealing with issues related to the work of governing bodies for which documents are posted on ODS;**

**(b) Until free access to ODS for all is implemented, access to the system should be provided to and encouraged for staff members of organizations other than the United Nations proper whose documents are posted on ODS;**

**(c) The Secretary-General should encourage all departments, regional commissions and organizations for which relevant documents are posted on ODS to indicate this on their own web sites and to secure the necessary authorization for implementing the direct access function; in particular, direct links to judgements of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal should be made from the main web sites maintained by United Nations Headquarters and its major duty stations;**

**(d) The Secretary-General should make arrangements, wherever possible, to provide baseline training sessions on the use of ODS, based on experience gained in the annual training sessions organized at Headquarters; CD-ROMs of training modules in different languages could be produced for use by the network of United Nations information centres and other services as appropriate, and by other interested users.**

7. The Secretary-General welcomes the recommendation. With regard to recommendations 6 (b), (c) and (d), the Dag Hammarskjöld Library is currently in the process of creating direct links from its bibliographic records to the ODS. The library and the secretariat of the Administrative Tribunal are engaged in a project to digitize Tribunal judgements not yet in electronic format for posting on ODS, and to index data extracted from the library's database. A compact disc product is also planned.

8. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library provides regular training sessions on the use of ODS. At Headquarters, courses are organized for permanent missions, Secretariat staff and other members of the Headquarters community, including staff of non-governmental organizations, accredited journalists and visiting United Nations information centre staff. Regional training programmes are also offered for depository libraries, covering, inter alia, ODS, often organized in conjunction with the local United Nations information centres. The library is also giving consideration to providing training materials in the official languages in electronic format.

9. All United Nations information centres have been provided with a password for access to ODS, which is used on a daily basis to retrieve United Nations documents. Additionally, the password provides an avenue to make documentation available to their reference library visitors, and it serves as a useful tool in responding to enquiries from the public. Now that the public has access to ODS, the United Nations information centres will be able to add a reference to it on their web sites (currently 50 sites in 26 local languages, in addition to official languages).

***Recommendation 7*: The Secretary-General should take measures aimed at improving user satisfaction and the user-friendliness of ODS, including:**

**(a) Conducting a survey to monitor user satisfaction with the system among a test group of users including Member States, translators and selected groups of general public users;**

**(b) Reviewing and updating the general information section on ODS, so as to provide better guidance on the symbols of bodies whose official documents are posted on the system, through in particular a hyperlink to an updated annex III on symbol series of major United Nations bodies, contained in document ST/LIB/34/Rev.2, entitled "United Nations documentation: a brief guide"; that annex should be expanded so as to include all organizations having their documents on ODS;**

**(c) Ensuring that the Arabic version of ST/LIB/34/Rev.2, currently unavailable on ODS, is released in time for the implementation of recommendation 7 (b) above;**

**(d) Reviewing the access policy relating to documents classified as conference room papers (CRPs) and consulting in particular with UNDP on the possibility of making available on ODS, on a non-restrictive basis, to all CRPs submitted to the Executive Board and otherwise freely accessible on the UNDP web site.**

10. The Arabic version of ST/LIB/34/Rev.2 is now posted on ODS. Furthermore, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library is already maintaining an updated version of the guide on its own web site in all six official languages.[1] The ODS site provides links to this site and other Dag Hammarskjöld Library reference tools.

11. The lack of uniformity in document symbols is a well-known fact at the Secretariat, and in this regard there have been and will continue to be meetings between the departments concerned in an effort to encourage the appropriate office(s) to assume a more prescriptive role, particularly with respect to overseas duty stations. Efforts will be pursued to assure greater uniformity between e-DRITS, ODS and UNBISnet.

12. With regard to the question of the access policy relating to documents classified as conference room papers, it should be noted that the issue is not unique to UNDP and involves other system organizations. The Secretary-General supports the recommendation, as a substantial number of other CRPs contain very useful background information and therefore should be made available on ODS.

***Recommendation 8*: The Secretary-General should include in the information and communication technology strategy any relevant aspect of the implementation of ODS in offices away from Headquarters, while ensuring that, once a chief information officer is appointed, future developments concerning ODS are considered in the wider framework of a coherent and coordinated approach to electronic document management at the United Nations.**

13. The status of ODS is currently detailed in information and communication technology strategy document A/57/620. Updates on the status of projects have been provided to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the General Assembly.[2] The administration will continue to ensure that any

relevant aspect of the implementation of ODS in offices away from Headquarters is included in the information and communication technology strategy updates.

*Notes*

[1] United Nations Documentation: Research Guide at http://www.un.org/Depts/dhl/resguide/.

[2] See A/57/355, A/57/472, A/58/194 and Corr.1 and 2, A/58/217 and A/AC.198/2003/2.